CHAPTER IV

PANCHAYATI RAJ IN INDIA - AN OVERVIEW

Panchayati Raj, a synonym of democratic decentralization, was introduced in India in the late 1950s and early 1960s to restore the erstwhile institution of Panchayati, the pristine glory that it enjoyed in ancient India. It represents a political idea and is reflected in the rural local-self government in its institutional form. The concept as such is not new to India. The plea for greater autonomy to the rural bodies received conceptual strength with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi on the national scene and his enunciation of the doctrine of the national development through autonomous rural organizations that he drove to model on the lines of panchayat system as it prevailed in ancient India. He envisaged five-tier system of village panchayats, taluka panchayats, district panchayats, provincial panchayats, and All-India panchayats. The administrative system envisaged by him was that of a pyramid whose broad base was composed of numerous village communities of the country. The higher panchayats shall tender sound advice, give expert guidance and information, supervise and co-ordinate the activities of the village panchayats with a view to increasing the efficiency of the administration and public service. But it would be the basic units that would dictate to the centre and not vice versa. In fact, the whole system would turn upside down, the village shall become the real and moving unit of administration.
Jayaprakash Narayan, having his own concept of Panchayati Raj states that there is no place for political parties. He opines that the success of them depends upon the extent to which political parties refrain from interfering with it and trying to convert it into their handmaid, and using it as a jumping ground to climb power. “Self-government through faction-fighting will not be self-government, but self-ruination.” Nehru provided a very elaborate account of the panchayats which worked admirably in the ancient period. They had enjoyed vast powers, including executive and judicial. Cases brought before Panchayats were expeditiously decided. It has been clearly brought out by Radha Kumud Muterji in his book entitled “History and Culture of Indian People”. According to him in the Mauryan Empire, the village community functioned like a self-governing corporation or republic giving the people healthy chance to run their government and manage their own local concerns and affairs. Thus, the Indian polity in those days was broadly based on truly democratic institutions.

The dawn of freedom had created the hope that the decentralized governance will be able to achieve its lost glory through the institutionalization of Mahatma Gandhi’s ideal of Gram Swaraj by creating a polity with maximum powers with the Panchayats and minimum powers with the central government. But this hope was shattered by the constitution-makers who framed a constitution that provided for the creation of a highly centralized federal system having no room for panchayats. However, the strong pressure from the
Gandhians did make them to provide for setting up of panchayats as the units of self-government in the villages in the non-justifiable directive principles of state policy. Consequently, no worthwhile legislation was enacted either at the national or at the state level to implement it.

Government’s attempts to do developmental work through the institutions by block development officers, in addition to nominated representatives of village Panchayats of that area and some other organizations like the co-operatives societies, failed miserably to accomplish decentralization to any satisfactory extent. Some state governments did try their best to decentralize powers but the overall situation did not improve. From 1957 to 1986, many committees including Balvantray Mehta (1957), K. Santhanam (1963), Ashok Mehta (1978), GVK Rao (1985) and L.M. Singhvi (1986) made a number of recommendations to the center. The resulting idea was introduced as a bill (64th Constitutional Amendment Bill) in the Lok Sabha in 1989 to achieve the above stated conflicting objectives. Though this bill could not be enacted, the idea was translated into the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which has brought about a new innovation in the grassroots politics in the country. It was hailed as a historic step in the empowerment of the people not only with a view to ensuring their more effective participation in the electoral process at the grassroots level, but also for entrusting them with a greater role in decision-making and developmental functions in matters of their immediate concern. For the first time PRIs have been admitted as the third
stratum of our democracy and federal polity. The new law focused the attention of the nation on the political structures and process of rural India, their significance for the rural society and their participation in the operation of these structures.

Rajasthan, the first state to implement the recommendations on ‘Democratic Decentralization’ resorted to minimum variation and patterned the three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj more or less, on the model suggested by the Balvantray Mehta team. The other states which followed suit, viz., Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab also did not bring out radical variation. In 1960, however, the Maharashtra government, while planning for the introduction of Panchayati Raj, made public its intention to make the district level body, i.e., the Zila Parishad, as the key executive authority in the Panchayati Raj system and thus initiated a basic change. A notable aspects of the evolution of Panchayati Raj in the early sixties, was the way the two western states, i.e. Maharashtra and Gujarat – not only accepted the ideas of Panchayati Raj, but in effect preferred a stronger tier at the district level. These two pioneers of a strong Zila Parishad pattern have remained the best examples of Panchayati Raj in the country not withstanding fluctuations, vicissitudes and setbacks, being experienced practically in the rest of the country.
4.1 Historical Background of Panchayti Raj

During the time of the Rigveda (1200 B.C), evidences suggest that self-governing village bodies called ‘sabhas’ existed. With the passage of time, these bodies became panchayats (council of five persons). Panchayats were functional institutions of grassroots governance in almost every village. The village panchayat or elected council has large powers both executive and judicial. Land was distributed by this panchayat which also collected taxes out of the produce and paid the government’s share on behalf of the village. Among these village councils, one larger panchayat or council is selected to supervise and interfere if necessary on the activities of other panchayats. Casteism and feudalistic system of governance under Mughal rule in the medieval period slowly eroded the self-government in villages. A new class of feudal chiefs and revenue collectors (zamindars) emerged between the ruler and the people.

The history of Panchayati Raj and how it came to be accepted is a worth mentioning effort. The genesis of the system of Panchayati Raj can be traced back to the vision of Mahatma Gandhi, who advocated the revival of the traditional panchayats so that Gram Swaraj, which had been a part of the social system in India, could become a reality. The Gandhian ideology had a spontaneous appeal to the rural masses, who were threatened with the problems of hunger, disease and poverty. Reordering of a composite traditional rural social system through a communitarian panchayat approach thus became an objective of local governance in independent India.¹
In India, parliamentary democracy is not the result of a natural development. It has not grown organically on the country’s own political and spiritual climate. Small elite class of people who class of people who, educated abroad has introduced it and hardly able to communicate with the population, the large part of which is mentally walled in by tradition and conceptions, thousand of years old. The government hopes to overcome this difficulty by reviving on a democratic basis, the age-old but long defunct panchayat system that gives each village certain autonomy. This is one of the boldest and most interesting experiments of modern India. If it succeeds, it will give the country a solid taste for democracy. It is considered that decentralization of democracy would lead to enlightened anarchy. Gandhiji advocated a stateless society.

The importance of Panchayati Raj system should be obvious in country where four out of every five citizens live in the villages. Panchayati Raj system is an integral part of the concerted system for social and economic development of the rural people. Panchayati Raj came to be established in parts of India as early as in 1959. It was felt that no speedy development in rural or backward areas was possible unless the people were involved in the programmes. The Panchayati Raj was thus devised as a means for furthering this involvement. Village council consisting of five members is called panchayat. Administration through the panchayat is called Panchayati Raj. What is now called Panchayati Raj was at first called ‘Democratic Decentralisation’, the purpose of which was to decentralise responsibility, utilise and develop local area and local group
initiative. Vinobaji wanted, “Gramdan as the first step to be taken before the introduction of gram panchayats”. Panchayat has an ancient flavour. It literally means an assembly of five, elected by the villagers. It represents a system, by which innumerable village republics of India were governed. Therefore, Panchayati Raj means governance by the elected five. Panchayats are expected to do everything for the development of villages; one can very briefly mention some of the important functions of every panchayat. It includes village administration, education, sanitation, providing medical needs and services to the poor.²

The panchayats have for centuries formed an integral part of village administration in our country. In south India, especially in Tamil Nadu, the panchayats had their roots in the past and is evident from the historical records, inscriptions and monuments. They played a vital role in the integration and development of village life. The present Kanyakumari district was under the rule of the Ayis, the pandiyas, the cholras, the nayaks and the venad rulers. Monarchy was replaced by democracy after independence. There are evidences of the functioning of gram sabha during the period of the above rulers.

Even the sangam literature mentions about ‘Manrams’ and ‘podhiyil’ which are grama sabhas of those times. There were ‘Mahasabhas’ in the Bhamadeya villages with enormous administrative powers. There were evidences of these sabhas even during Rig veda period. Apart from developmental activities the duty of the sabha was to administer justice. During
the chola regime, local bodies functioned as autonomous rural institutions with vigor and efficiency. In order to help the administration a highly developed committee system called ‘variam’ was established. Time to time elections was conducted by the system called ‘Kuda Olai Murai’. The members thus elected would constitute themselves various variams such as Eri variam (Lake Committee), Thotta variam (Garden Committee) and Pon variam (Gold or Treasury or Finance Committee) for a duration of one year. An officer designated as karanathan maintained the accounts and he will read out and submit the accounts in the panchayat committee.

After the Nayak rule, Kanyakumari district was under venad rulers up to September, 1949. During their rule, there were three types of assemblies; at the village level there was a village assembly called Tarakootam. Nadukootam was the assembly containing representatives of villages and perumkootam was the national assembly represented by the whole kingdom 3.

After the merger of Kanyakumari district with Tamil Nadu, the local bodies were allowed to continue as such upto 31st March, 1962. From 1st April, 1962, the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1958 was extended. Before March 1962, all panchayats had a full time panchayat officer. But as per the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1958, town panchayats were governed by executive officers. Accordingly all panchayats in the district were upgraded as full-fledged town panchayats and panchayat officers were redesignated as ‘Executive Officers’. On April 1st, 1962, nine panchayat unions were inaugurated in the districts.
They are Agasteeswaram, Thovalai, Rajakkamangalam, Kurunthencode, Thuckalay, Thiruvattar, Killiyoor, Munchirai and Melpuram. At the state level, the Director of Rural Development is the head of the department. At the district level the collector is the chief. The main function of the panchayat unions is the implementation of the various development programmes of the state and central governments. They include National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP), Self Sufficiency Scheme and Rural Landless Employees Guarantee Programme (RLEGP). They have to carry out repairs to lands of minor irrigation, maintain rural dispensaries, maternity and child welfare centers and execute rural works.\textsuperscript{4}

Prior to 1969, the people elected members of the wards directly and they in turn elected the presidents of the panchayats. The presidents of the panchayats elected the chairperson of the panchayat union. In 1969, the president of panchayat, Chairman of the union and the people directly elected municipalities. The local bodies thus formed were dissolved in 1979. Later elections were held on 23\textsuperscript{rd} February, 1986. The political parties were allowed to field their candidates. Till 1981, town panchayats were under the administration of a director of rural development and local administration. From 7\textsuperscript{th} May 1981, a separate directorate for town panchayats was constituted. In the year 1982 district town panchayat officer was appointed. From 1984 district town panchayat officer himself acted as special officer. In the year September 1986, elections were held and presidents and council of members took charge of panchayats. In 1996, first election held to ‘Town Panchayats’
and ‘Municipalities’ as per the New Panchayat Acts. The Tamil Nadu Municipalities Act, 1994, gave provision of drinking water, public conveyance, street lights, and maintenance of streets, proper drainage and other basic amenities are the duties of the panchayats. They implemented state and central government development programmes such as Swarna Jayanthi, Sahakari Rozhar Yojana, Basic Amenities Scheme and Tenth Finance Commission allotment. In Kerala, people prepare the five year plans at the panchayat level. On an average a village panchayat in Kerala gets ₹60 lakhs per year whereas in Kanyakumari District it is not even ₹10 lakhs.\textsuperscript{5}

\textbf{4.2 Panchayati Raj Systems during British Period}

After the taking over of administration by the British East India Company, Lord Rippon was the Governor General of India, who was rightly called the Father of Local Self Government in India. In 1894, the Travancore government constituted town panchayat committees with certain powers to improve the conservancy and sanitation of the respective towns. The town improvement committees was also formed in the state. Nagercoil was one such town panchayat committee. At that time town improvement committee fund was created. Duties such as sanitation, maintenance of public wells, public conveyances, street lights and provision of public health were arranged by town panchayat committees. Similar town improvement committees were formed in the year 1913 in the towns of Colachel and Padmanabapuram and in 1914 in the town of Kuzhithurai.\textsuperscript{6}
Based on Madras Municipalities Act, 1884 and Punjab Municipalities Act, 1891, the Municipalities Act of Travancore state was passed in 1920. According to the Act, maintenance of roads, street lights, public health, registration of birth and death, educational activities, public parks and recreation centres came under the purview of municipalities. As per the Act, the former town panchayat committees of Nagercoil, Colachel, Kuzhithurai and Padmanabapuram were reconstituted as municipalities. In 1946, the official heads of the municipalities were designated as ‘Commissioners’, who were appointed by the government. Travancore Village Act was passed in 1935 which states that the government had powers to declare any village or cluster of villages as village panchayat. The first panchayat formed was Bhoothapandi. In 1940, Travancore Village Union Act was passed. The term of office of members was three years. The first major legislature after independence was the Travancore-Cochin Panchayat Act, 1950. First panchyat election was held in the district on 15th August, 1953.

The panchayat had never been the priority of the British rulers. The rulers were interested in the creation of controlled local bodies, which could help them in their trading interests by collecting taxes from people. When the colonial administration came under severe financial pressure after the 1857, the remedy sought was decentralisation in terms of transferring responsibility for road and public works to local bodies. However, the thrust was compelled decentralisation to municipal administration. The Royal Commission on decentralisation (1907) under the chairmanship of C.E.H. Hobhouse recognized
the importance of panchayats at the village level. The commission recommended that it was most desirable, to associate the people with the local tasks of administration and suggested to constitute and develop village panchayats for the administration of local village affairs.\(^7\)

But the Montague-Chemsford Reforms (1919) brought local self-government as a provincial transferred subject, under the domain of Indian Ministries in the provinces. Due to organisational and fiscal constraints, the reform was unable to make panchayat institutions truly democratic and vibrant. However, the most significant development of this period was the establishment of village panchayats in a number of provinces, that were no longer mere adhoc judicial tribunal, but representative institutions symbolizing the corporate character of the village and having a wide jurisdiction in respect of civic matters. By 1925, eight provinces had passed Panchayat Acts and by 1926, six native states had also passed Panchayat Laws. In spite of various committees such as the Royal Commission on decentralisation (1907), the report of Montague and Chemsford on Constitutional Reform (1919) and the Government of India Resolutions (1918), a hierarchical administrative structure based on supervision and control was evolved. The administrator became the focal point of rural governance. The British government were not concerned with decentralised democracy but were aiming for colonial objectives.

The Indian National Congress from the 1920 to 1947, emphasized the issue of all-India Swaraj, and organized movements for independence under the
leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, father of our nation. The task of preparing any sort of blueprint for the local level was neglected. As a result there was no consensus among the top leaders regarding the status and role to be assigned to the institution of rural local self-government; rather there were divergent views on the subject. On the one end Gandhi favoured village Swaraj and strengthening the village panchayat to the fullest extent and on the other end, Dr. B.R. Ambedker opposed this idea. He believed that the village represented regressive India, a source of oppression. The model state hence had to build safeguards against such social oppression and the only way it could be done was through the adoption of the parliamentary model of politics. During the drafting of the constitution of India, PRIs were placed in the non-justifiable part of the constitution, the Directive Principles of State Policy, as Article 40. The article read the state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. However, no worthwhile legislation was enacted either at the national or state level to implement it.

The promulgation of the Assam local self-government Act, 1915, brought about a change of approach. The Act provided for the establishment of the village panchayat, for the first time on a formal and legal basis. It also provided for an elective non-official majority in the panchayat and for the election of non-officials as chairpersons and vice-chairpersons. The Act delegated powers and functions to the village authorities relating to village sanitation and village works. In 1926, another Act was passed as a Panchayat
Act because of the failure of the Panchayat Scheme under the Act of 1915. The functions of the village authority under the Act of 1926 were listed as water supply, medical relief and sanitation. However, panchayat institutions under the British proved to be a failure, because these measures were more of gestures rather than efforts to genuinely empower the local bodies.  

4.3 Post – Independence Period

In the post – independence period, Assam was one of the pioneering states to introduce Panchayati Raj by enacting Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1948. It provided for the division of rural Assam into panchayat areas, with each division consisting of a number of villages and each village having a primary panchayat. All adults were voters. The Act provided that primary panchayats would have executive bodies. This was a notable improvement on the earlier position.

4.4 Recent Trend in Panchayati Raj

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act was passed by the parliament in April, 1993. The amendment provided a constitutional status to the PRIs in India and left no discretion with the state governments in several important matters pertaining to these institutions. Before the 73rd amendment was made effective, the original constitution provided for a directive to the government to take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with the powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as the units of self-
government. But, by mid-eighties it was realised that the directive was not sufficient to institutionalise Panchayati Raj in India.

The practice of Panchayati Raj as per the directive principles of the state policy was not up to the satisfaction of the policy makers. There were several reasons for this. One of the reasons was that no uniform pattern of Panchayati Raj was being followed by the state governments. Few states followed a two-tier system, while the others followed three tier system. Further, many states were not holding regular elections to the PRIs. Since the elections to the PRIs were being held by the state governments themselves, their fairness and independence was seriously doubtful. Moreover, there were no standard guidelines with regard to delegation of powers to such institutions.

The political policy makers then began to think in terms of amendments to the constitution to empower the people in the rural areas, more particularly the women, and give a constitutional status to the PRIs, so as to bring uniformity in this regard in the entire country. The Constitutional Amendment Act was passed in 1993 and the state governments were then required to enact revised Panchayati Raj Acts as per the provisions of the amended constitution. The constitution now provides that every PRI shall continue for a period of five years. The states have also been empowered to allow the PRIs in their respective Legislative Acts to levy, collect and appropriate several tolls and taxes. The PRIs have been made responsible for preparing district, block and
panchayat level plans for ensuring economic development in their respective areas. The flow of funds for economic development would be based on such plans. With the power to levy several taxes at panchayat-level, these provisions would empower the PRIs financially and make them self-reliant.

The philosophy of Panchayati Raj is deeply rooted in the tradition and culture of rural India. It provides for a system of self–governance at the village level. However, it did not have a constitutional status till 1992. 23rd April, 1993 was a landmark day in the history of Panchayati Raj in India as on this day, the institution of Panchayati Raj was accorded constitutional status through the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, thereby seeking to transform Mahatma Gandhi’s dream of Gram Swaraj a reality. The 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 mandates provisions for establishment of a three-tier structure (Village Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti or intermediate level panchayat and zilla parishad or district level panchayat), gram sabhas at the village level should have regular elections to panchayats every five years. Proportionate seat reservation for SCs/STs, reservation of not less than 1/3rd seats for women and constitution of State Finance Commissions are the recommended measures to improve the finance of panchayats.9

4.5 Ministry of Panchayati Raj

Dey S.K. (1905-1989) pioneered and steered the course of community development and Panchayati Raj in the challenging, formative period of India’s
independence as Cabinet Minister of Co-operation and Panchayati Raj under the Prime Ministership of Jawaharlal Nehru. After Nehru’s death he took leave from ministerial responsibilities to dedicate himself fully for the cause of Panchayati Raj as long as he lived. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj is a branch of the Government of India looking after the ongoing process of decentralizations and local governance in the states. In a federation the powers and functions of the government are divided among two governments. In India it is the union government and the various state governments. However with the passage of 73rd and 74th Amendment Act of the constitution of India in 1993, the division of powers and functions has been further tickled down to Local Self Governments [Panchayat at village levels and Municipalities and Municipal Corporations in towns and large cities]. As such India now has not two tier but three tier system of governments in its federal set up. Ministry of Panchayati Raj looks in to all matters relating to Panchayati Raj and PRIs. It was created in May 2004. A minister of Cabinet rank heads the ministry.

Ministry of Panchayati Raj is responsible for the work of advocacy and for monitoring of the implementation of constitution 73rd Amendment Act on the Provisions of the Panchayats [Extension to the scheduled Areas] Act. A new ministry of Panchayati Raj has been created with effect from 27th May 2004. As per the amended allocation of business rules, all matters relating to Panchayati Raj and PRIs are to be looked after by the newly created Ministry. The state governments or union territory administrations, at present, are at
varying degrees of the implementation of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj will also be responsible for formulation and implementation of an action plan to make PRIs to emerge as institutions of local self-government securing economic development and social justice in their respective areas. The ministry attaches great importance to the capacity building of elected representatives and officials of PRIs as well as functionaries involved in the rural development programmes. It is estimated that about three million elected members and the staff assigned to the elected bodies need training to enable them to discharge their functions effectively. The ministry is also funding research studies, workshops and seminars for development of panchayats. The ministry implements the scheme of national awards for best panchayats to encourage PRIs in discharging their role of institutions of self–government to be able to enforce economic development and social justice at the local level.\textsuperscript{10}

4.6 Provisions Relating to the Panchyathi Raj

The original constitution of India did not contain elaborate provisions with respect to PRIs in India, though village panchayats as units of local administration had been functional since the early British days. Many state governments have enacted their Panchayati Raj Acts and had adopted two tiers or three tier system of PRIs. In the meanwhile, several committees appointed by the government of India, including Balwant Raj Mehta Committee, submitted their reports which were also considered and selectively adopted by
various state governments. The provisions of the constitutional amendment required the state legislatures to enact their own laws to enforce the new constitutional provisions. These constitutional provisions provide for a uniform three tier system of the PRIs, with gram panchayats at village level, panchayat samitis at the intermediate (Block) level and zilla parishads at the district level. Minimum age prescribed for a candidate seeking election to any office of the PRIs is twenty one years. These provisions relating to timely elections as well as free and fair elections to the PRIs are to be implemented by the State Election Commissioner, who is to be appointed by the governor in every state. The State Election Commissioner, can be removed only on the same grounds and in the same manner as in case of the Judge of a high court. The constitution allows land improvement, rural development schemes, minor irrigation, primary education, fisheries, animal husbandry and development of women and children which can be assigned by the states to the PRIs.  

4.7 Local Self-Government

Panchayati Raj (Rule of Village Committee) system is a three-tier system in the state with elected bodies at the village, taluk and district levels. It ensures greater participation of people and more effective implementation of rural development programmes. India has a history of Panchayati Raj starting from a self-sufficient and self-governing village communities that survived the rise and fall of empires in the past to the modern legalized institutions of governance at the third tier provided with constitutional support.
There are three varieties of personnel system for the local government institutions in India namely: (i) separate (ii) unified and (iii) integrated. Under the separate system, each local government unit has full control over matters concerning recruitment, control and discipline to its staff. Under the unified system, state-wise or region-wise common cadres of some or all categories of staff of local government are constituted. Such cadres are fully managed by the state governments. In the integrated system, the state government employees and the local government employees come from the common cadre managed by the state government. It is only in separate system that the local government institution has total control over its staff. In the other two systems, it has no power to recruit or to dismiss its staff and even in the day–to-day management, its power to control personnel is severely limited in the unified system and negligible under the integrated system.12

4.8 Types of Panchayats

India follows a three-tier panchayat system – gram panchayat at a village level, Panchayat Samiti at a block level, and Zila Parishad at a district level. Gram panchayat, which is considered as the “cornerstone” of the Panchayati Raj system, operates at the village or small town level. It is incumbent upon the elected head to take stock of the infrastructural development of the region, tax collection, and public health and hygiene. The head of the gram panchayat regularly convenes meetings on pressing issues.
District level panchayat or the Zila Parishad has an IAS officer as the administrative head. The prime role of the panchayat is to ensure that the locals have access to essential services and facilities. Its focus remains on education, health and agricultural segments. Besides, Zila Parishad is also entrusted with the duty of inspiring entrepreneurial spirit and implementing employment schemes. The members of Zila Parishad mainly comprise of MPs elected from that particular district. The major chunk of their revenue comes in the form of grants from the state government, along with the panchyat’s earnings from taxes on water, tourism and markets.

Block panchayat (Panchayat Samiti) is the replication of same style of governance at the tehsil level. It’s a form of the Panchayati Raj that works for the villages of the tehsil that are called a development block. The governing body is composed of ex-MPs and MLAs of the area, and other elected members. Block panchayat takes care of important departments such as finance, public work, health, education, and IT. An individual officer heads each department. He/she is accountable before the Block Development Officer (BDO), who is at the helm of its administration. The panchayat members are elected for five years. While the members of the panchayats are elected directly by the people, the Panchayat Samiti members are elected by the panchayats.

4.9 Panchayati Raj in Tamil Nadu

Local bodies in Tamil Nadu could be dated back to the ancient period wherein the village administration was taken care by a village assembly known
as Sabai in every village. Further, each village was divided into several wards known as mandalams. This is evident from the epigraph inscriptions found in Vaikuntha Perumal temple near Uthiramerur. They used the Pot-ticket (Kudavalai) system of election to elect the representatives to the assembly.

Later came the British rule in India in which the centralisation of governance was enforced. People in the interior of the villages had to walk up to the central authorities for their obligations and grievances. Anyhow this system faded out as the British government realised the pitfalls in this system. Laudable efforts of Lord Ripon brought legislation in this aspect which created unions in small towns and villages, to facilitate proper sanitation and lighting. Later, councils were constituted in this regard for which the members are directly elected in elections. Councils were made accountable to an Inspector and Chairman. Though urbanisation was less prevalent those days, Chennai had the honour of having such Municipal Corporation status even in 1688. Chennai corporation in the Madras Presidency (now in Tamil Nadu) established in 1688 is the such oldest local body in India and also on any common wealth country out side United Kingdom. Urban local bodies known Municipalities were in existence. A department named local, municipal department was functioning in the secretariat from 1916, and it had local, municipal, plague, medical and legislative branches. 13

The district wise details of panchayats in Tamil Nadu is presented in table 4.1
### Table 4.1
Panchyati Raj in Tamil Nadu District Wise Details

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<td>Rural Village Panchayats</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>123</strong></td>
<td><strong>529</strong></td>
<td><strong>385</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,524</strong></td>
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</table>


### 4.9.1 Madras Panchayati Raj Act

The government of Tamil Nadu in 1958 enacted this Madras Panchayati Raj Act. Women’s representation in Panchayati Raj bodies of Tamil Nadu was read by this Act. The lower level Panchayati Raj in the state was called the village and town panchayats and intermediary level structures were called panchayat councils, at the apex, they were called the district development councils. The first ordinary elections were held to all the rural and urban local bodies in October, 1996. The second and third ordinary elections to the local bodies were conducted in October, 2001 and October, 2006 respectively. The fourth ordinary elections to the local bodies were conducted in October 2011.
The following table 4.2 furnishes the number of seats and office in the three tier system of panchayats for which the elections in October 2011 were held.

### Table 4.2

**Seats and Office in Rural Local Bodies in Tamil Nadu**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>No. of seats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Village panchayat wards</td>
<td>40,849</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Village panchayat ward members</td>
<td>97,458</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Panchayat union wards</td>
<td>6,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>District panchayat wards</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Village panchayat presidents</td>
<td>12,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Panchayat union chairpersons</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>District panchayat chairpersons</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Assistant Director of Statistics- 2015

#### 4.9.2 Reservation of seats and offices on Rotation

The government amended rule 7 of the Tamil Nadu panchayats (Reservation of Seats and Rotation ofReserved Seats) Rules, 1995 by virtue of which the posts of president of village panchayats and chairpersons of panchayat unions and district panchayats were reserved for SCs, STs and women. The following table shows the details of reservation of seats and offices to women, SCs and STs in rural local bodies.
TABLE 4.3
Reservation of Offices and Seats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Category of Reservation</th>
<th>Total No. of Offices / Seats</th>
<th>Reserved for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>District panchayat chair persons</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10  (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Panchayat union council chair persons</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>140  (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Village panchayat president</td>
<td>12,524</td>
<td>4275 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>District panchayat wards</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>226  (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Panchayat union ward members</td>
<td>6570</td>
<td>2302 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Village panchayat ward members</td>
<td>97458</td>
<td>32638 (33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Hand Book, 2015. Assistant Director of Statistics, Nagercoil
Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to total

4.9.3 Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1994

Panchayati Raj or the local government was constitutionalized on 24th April, 1993, and in that back drop Tamil Nadu government passed the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1994, on 19th April, 1994. As per this Act Panchayati Raj was established under a three tier system village which include panchayat, panchayat union and district level panchayats. In each panchayat there is a gram sabha and all the members of the village are the members of the gram sabha. The government has ordered the conduct of gram sabha meetings for a minimum of four times a year (26th January, 1st May, 15th August and 2nd October).
4.9.4 Village Panchayat

Village panchayats form the grass root level of democracy as they form the local government for the basic building blocks of our country i.e villages. It is set up in villages where the population is less then 300. There are about 12,254 village panchayats in this state. Gram sabha is a part of village panchayat which consists of elected ward members. Village panchayat president is an executive authority in village panchayat. They must meet atleast four times a year.

4.9.5 Panchayat Union

Panchayat union is the group of village panchayats. They serve as the link between the village and the district administration. They form the local government at the taluk level. Tamil Nadu has 385 panchayat unions. Panchayat union council consists of elected ward members from the villages. A panchayat union chairperson, who is elected in absentia by the ward members of the council, heads it.

4.9.6 District Panchayats

District panchayats form the cream of the Panchayati Raj system. They take the top slot with mainly advisory power to the rest. Developmental and administrations of the district in rural areas are in its hands. It consists of ward members elected from various villages in its jurisdiction. It is presided by district panchayat chairperson, who is indirectly elected by its ward members.
There are 31 district panchayats in this state except for the district of Chennai as it is an urban district. District collector is the ex-officio chairman of the district rural development agency. There are also 10 corporations, 125 Municipalities and 529 Town panchayats in this state.

4.9.7 Elections

Election to the local bodies in Tamil Nadu is held once in five years, by the Tamil Nadu State Election Commission. Both direct and indirect elections apply for local bodies. Direct elections posts include:

xiv. **Urban Bodies**
1. Corporation Mayor
2. Municipality /Town panchayat chairperson
3. Corporation /Municipality/ Town panchayat councilor

xv. **Rural Bodies**
1. Village Panchayat President
2. District Panchayat Ward Member
3. Panchayat Union Ward Member
4. Village Panchayat Ward Members

Indirect election posts include chairpersons of district panchayats and panchayat union, deputy mayor of corporations, vice-chairpersons of municipalities and town panchayats. Various statutory or standing committees are also constituted by way of indirect elections.13
4.10 Importance of Panchayat Raj

Panchayats can reach where the bureaucrats can’t. India has accepted this fact with grace. Each village has its own set of issues, which only the locals can understand. Members of a panchayat are far more cognizant of the region-specific problems, and thus they are capable of taking a more informed decision in favour of the people of their village or tehsil. Moreover, this mechanism of local self-governance acts as a force to counter the dominance of a particular group or caste in a village.

According to experts, the evolution of panchayats is seen as a boon by the villagers, as they can now discuss about their issues with confidence, and even seek solutions through the Panchayat in their region. The panchayat system has made a common man even in the rural areas, more conscious of their rights. The good thing about panchayats is their high-degree of accountability before the people. When it comes to administrative benefits, the Panchayati Raj has “bridged the gulf between the central government and the people in the rural areas.” The panchayat system also works towards the development of their regions according to the needs of the people. A panchayat works at various levels, from creation of necessary establishments such as primary schools, to hygiene-related issues, to water requirements, to seek the central government’s help towards generating jobs at the village level as well.
The increasing prominence of the panchayat at various levels in the village areas, led to the creation of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2004, to empower Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and “ensure efficient delivery of services and inclusive development of the nation.”

4.11 Committees Related to Panchayathi Raj

4.11.1 The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957)

In 1957, Balwant Rai Mehta Committee studied the Community Development Projects and the National Extension Service and assessed the extent to which the movement had succeeded in utilising local initiatives and in creating institutions to ensure continuity in the process of improving economic and social conditions in rural areas. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee submitted its report on 24th November 1957 concluding that community development can happen only when the community was involved in the planning, decision-making and implementation process.

4.11.2 Santhanam Committee (1963)

One of the prime areas of Panchayati Raj institutions was fiscal decentralisation. The committee was appointed to look solely at the issue of PRIs finance, in 1963. The fiscal capacity of PRIs tends to be limited, as rich resources of revenue are pre-empted by higher levels of government, and the issue is still debated today. The committee was asked to determine issues related to sanctioning of grants to Panchayati Raj Institutions by the state government, evolving mutual financial relations between the three tiers of
Panchayati Raj Institutions, gifts and donation, handing over revenue in full or part to Panchayati Raj Institutions. The committee recommended the following:

i) Panchayats should have special powers to levy special tax on land revenues and house taxes.

ii) People should not be burdened with too many demands (taxes).

iii) All grants and subventions at the state level should be mobilized and sent in a consolidated form to various PRIs.

iv) A Panchayati Raj Finance Corporation should be set up to look into the financial resource of PRIs at all levels, provide loans and financial assistance to these grassroot level governments and also provide for the non-financial requirements of village.

4.11.3 Ashok Mehta Committee (1978)

With the Janata party coming to power at the centre in 1977 a serious view was taken on the weaknesses in the functioning of Panchayat Raj. It was decided to appoint a high level committee under the chairmanship of Ashok Mehta to examine and suggest measures to strengthen PRIs. The committee had to evolve an effective decentralized system of development for PRIs. It submitted its report in August 1978 and made some suggestions to revive and strengthen the declining Panchayati Raj System in the country. The main suggestions of the committee were
1. The three tier system of Panchayati Raj should be replaced by the two-tier system. Zilla Parishad at the district level and below if the Mandal Panchayat consists of a group of villages covering a population of 15000 to 20000.

2. A district should be the first point for decentralisation under popular supervision below the state level.

3. Zila Parishad should be the executive body and made responsible for planning at the district level.

4. There should be an official participation of political parties at all levels of Panchayat elections.

5. The Panchayati Raj institutions should have compulsory powers of taxation to mobilise their own financial resources.

6. There should be a regular social audit by a district level agency and by a committee of legislators to check whether the funds allotted for the vulnerable social and economic groups are actually spent on them.

7. The state government should not supersede the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In case of an imperative supersession, election should be held within 6 months from the date of supersession.

8. The Nyaya Panchayats should be kept as separate bodies from that of development Panchayats. They should be presided over by a qualified judge.

9. The Chief Electoral Officer of the state in consultation with the Chief Election Commissioner should organise and conduct the Panchayati Raj elections.

10. Development functions should be transferred to the Zila Parishad and all development staff should work under its control and supervision.
11. The voluntary agencies should play an important role in mobilising the support of the people for Panchayati Raj.

12. A minister of Panchayati Raj should be appointed in the state council of ministers to look after the affairs of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

13. Seats of SCs and STs should be reserved on the basis of their population.

14. A constitutional recognition should be accorded to the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

**4.11.4 G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985)**

This committee was appointed to look at various aspects of PRIs. The committee was of the opinion that a total view of rural development must be taken in which PRIs must play a central role in handling the problems of people. It recommended the following:

1. PRIs have to be activated and provided with all the required support to become effective organisations,

2. PRIs at district level and below should be assigned the work of planning, implementing and monitoring of rural development programmes, and

3. The block development office should be the spinal cord of the rural development process.

**4.11.5 L. M. Singhvi Committee (1986)**

This committee also evaluated the functioning of Panchayati Raj in India. The Gram Sabha was considered as the base of a decentralised democracy and PRIs are viewed as institutions of self-governance which
would actually facilitate the participation of people in the process of planning and development. It’s recommendations were

(i) Local self-government should be constitutionally recognized, protected and preserved by the inclusion of new chapter in the constitution.

(ii) No-involvement of political parties in panchayat elections.

The suggestion of giving panchayats constitutional the Sakarria Commission, but the idea, however opposed status, gained momentum in the late 1980s especially because of the endorsement by the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who introduced the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill in 1989. The 64th amendment bill was prepared and introduced in the lower house of parliament. But it got defeated in the Rajya Sabha as non-convincing. He lost the general elections too. In 1989, the national front introduced the 74th Constitutional Amendment Bill, which could not become an Act because of the dissolution of the ninth Lok sabha. All the suggestions and recommendations of the various committees for strengthening PRIs were considered while formulating the new Constitutional Amendment Act 1992.

4.11.6 73rd Constitution Amendment Act

The present Panchayati Raj differs from the Balwant Rai pattern in two respects. First, the earlier Panchayati Raj was not a political institution but only an implementing body. In this pattern there was no role for political parties.
Elections to panchayat bodies were held on individual basis. The political parties did not nominate the candidates contesting for elections. The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act allows political parties to enter into election fray. In other words, elections to Panchayati Raj today are contested on party basis.

Second, the present Panchayati Raj is not an implementing body to the development programmes. It is a decision making body and rules over the governance of the village. A very conspicuous aspect of the present Panchayati Raj is that it empowers the women and weaker sections of village in the wielding of power.

The members of weaker sections including women are given representation by a fixed quota fixed by the constitution. In other words, membership to Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) is reserved vis-a-vis the members of the weaker sections. The Panchayati Raj thus has empowered the women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The present Panchayati Raj has taken its from through an amendment to the Constitution of India in 1993. It is, therefore, the central Act which is adopted by all the states.

**Features of the Act**

1. Panchayats will be considered political institutions in a truly decentralised structure.
(2) The Gram Sabha shall be recognised as the life-line of the Panchayati Raj. The voters of the village or clusters of villages will constitute its members.

(3) There will be direct elections in all the three tiers of governance:

(i) Gram Panchayat at the village level,

(ii) Panchayat Samiti at the intermediate level; and

(iii) Zila Parishad at the district level.

(4) So far as the empowerment of women is concerned, the Act has provided that at least one-third of the total seats at all levels shall be reserved for women of whom, one-third shall be from the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. In this context it is important to note that at least one-third of the total posts of the office bearers at all levels will also be reserved for the women.

(5) Each PRI will have a tenure of five years and in case it is dissolved by the state government fresh election will be held within a period of six months.

(6) The election to local bodies has to be conducted regularly.

(7) There will be a separate Election Commission and also a Finance Commission for PRIs in every state.

(8) It is obligatory on the part of centre as well as the state to provide adequate funds for the PRIs to enable them to function properly. In addition, the PRIs will have their own fund raising capacity on the basis of the local resources.

(9) Some states like Rajasthan, Haryana and Orissa have debarred the candidates, having more than two children, from contesting in the election with a view to controlling population growth. But in these states due to the low average age of marriage of girls (19); they would have
crossed the two children norm by the time they contest for elections. Hence, it will be difficult for the states to get suitable women candidates for the Panchayati Raj elections.

(10) Some states like Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Karnataka have provision of Nyaya Panchayat to settle the disputes at all the three levels.

However, the 73rd Amendment Act does not make it obligatory for states to provide for Nyaya Panchayats to solve local disputes. Secondly, although the objective of the Act is to build the Panchayati Raj as an effective decentralised political institution at the grassroot level, the division of functions in its XI Schedule makes it in reality, essentially an implementing agency for developmental activities.

4.12 Functions of Panchayati Raj
The structure of Panchayati Raj is designed in such a way that the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act gives certain powers and functions to the three-tier structure of the Panchayati Raj. The idea is to decentralise the power of rural administration to the elected representatives. The Act enables the elected representatives to take their own decisions within the framework of Act.

1. Agricultural development and irrigation facilities;
2. Land reforms;
3. Eradication of poverty;
4. Dairy farming, poultry, piggery and fish rearing;
5. Rural housing;
6. Safe drinking water;
7. Social forestry, fodder and fuel;
8. Primary education, adult education and informal training;
9. Roads and buildings;
10. Markets and fairs;
11. Child and women development;
12. Welfare of weaker sections, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

4.13 Provisions of Panchaythi Raj

1. Enforcement of prohibition;
2. Protection of land;
3. Minor forest produce;
4. Water resources;
5. Village markets;
6. Development.

If we analyse the functions of Panchayati Raj, it is found that the Act is highly elaborate. The functions of Panchayati Raj in terms of Gram Sabha, Panchayat Samiti, and Zila Parishad are spelt out separately. Quite like functions the administrative powers are also ascribed to each tier. On the whole, the Panchayati Raj system empowers the total functioning of the village system. It stresses on the limited autonomy of the village but also encourages it for interdependence with other clusters of villages.

4.14 Empowerment of Women

All over the world and particularly in south and East Asia the gender problem has loomed large during the current years. The gender issue has
become a crucial point of argument. The United Nations, in its various declarations, have made it clear that women now cannot be asked to wait for any more time. Their sufferings are historical. Thus, the gender problem, in the context of new forces of development, assumes vital importance. Underlining the problem of the empowerment of women is the plea for shared responsibility between the male and female. The simplest way to distinguish between sex and gender is to define sex as biological and gender as socially and culturally constructed and, therefore, variable over space and time.

Whereas multiple sexual encounters for men are seen as the sign of their virility, menstruation for women is seen as polluting in many cultures. Actually gender is constructed in part through the organisation of our culturally experienced bodies. The gender disabilities are, therefore, not uniform all over the country. There are regional variations in the power enjoyed by women. For instance, in north India, there is much discrimination against women. There is a limited public space for them. Young girls are not allowed to move freely.

However, such a hard discrimination is relatively lesser in the southern states. In Kerala, because of the high rate of literacy, there is least discrimination against the women. However, in Tamil Nadu, there are instances of female infanticide. On a broader plane it could be said that there is much discrimination against the women all over India and south-east Asia.
Women considered to be a weaker section of society. Such a state of socioeconomic affairs warrants for a plan to give special political status to the women. The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act has made an effort to give some special powers to women in all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj.

It is argued that women have acquired some improvement in their social and economic life. There was a time in the earlier part of 1930s when Bombay University did not allow a woman to take a course in graduation. The candidate was informed that the university rules did not permit women to take admission in graduate courses.

The framers of 73rd Constitution Amendment Act had the argument that social and economic status of women could not be improved much without political power. The females in the village need to be given some political power. They should have their share in the decisions made the development of their village. The new Panchayati Raj is a part of the effort to empower the women at least at the village level.

The reservation of one-third seats for women along with the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes is, therefore, a bold step towards the empowerment of women. It is quite interesting that the women who have been working as farm labourers, cleaning the utensils and fetching water, are legally permitted to share the jajam with the males of the village in matters of decision making. Women are empowered not only through statuary but also through women emancipation movement, education, communication, media, political
parties and general awakening. Giving reservation in the Panchayati Raj is one of the several efforts made simultaneously in the society to empower women. And, above all, the empowerment action, whether to women or poor and weaker sections of society, has a multiplying effect.

For instance, when a woman in the village gets a berth in the Panchayat Samiti, she becomes automatically powerful in the family, kin and village. She is listened to by the people, for she is a decision maker; she can do and undo certain things in the village.

She can get her school raised to higher standard; she can get a water pump installed at a particular place in a village and so on and so forth. Surely, she is not everything by becoming member of the samiti but definitely she can influence the decisions of the samiti.

4.15 Need for the Empowerment of Women

4.15.1 Health

One of the reasons for empowerment of women is health. It is found that women suffer from poor health condition. There is a general practice in India that the women first serve food to the male members of the family, then comes the turn of children and finally they take food whether it is adequate or not. They have to bear children and they do not get the required calories which are desirable for pregnant women. Thus, the women suffer in the matter of health because of the surrounding cultural and social set-up.
In the matter of medical treatment also the women are sufferers. We have enough research evidence which shows that both women and children are discriminated in giving medical treatment. Bidyut Mohanty observes that women and children are neglected in health care.

With regard to health care, discrimination against females is also reflected in the type and relative frequency in utilising the same. The data show males receive better medical treatment than females in all age groups but this is more prominent in case of children. Mohanty further providing evidence to his generalisation says that even in Punjab the second girl child is often neglected in terms of medicare. He argues that “this kind of discrimination against women cuts across castes and classes.

Even though there are monetary transactions among the low caste women which are kept hidden from the male family members, these do not go very far in enhancing their social power though they are slightly better placed in this respect than, the lower middle class women. However, women in Kerala are better off compared to their counterparts in other states of the country because of very high rate of women literacy in the state.

4.15.2 Literacy

Empowerment of women is needed because of the poor state of illiteracy among women. Due to illiteracy and lack of education women suffer a lot.
They work in the fields, but the fields legally do not belong to them; they live in and work for the upkeep of a house which does not belong to them. It is a real tragedy.

In 50 per cent of the states the sex ratio is below the national average. With regard to women literacy rate, only 39 per cent of the total female population above seven years of age is literate. In some of the northern states female literacy rate is much below the national average. For example, the female literacy rate in rural Rajasthan is only 12 per cent (Census of India, 1991). Besides, so far as the school enrolment is concerned, there is a huge gap between boys and girls.

Of course, recently, the life expectancy at birth of females has exceeded marginally to that of males. This can be explained in terms of more females in the age group of 60 and above compared to males. However, in the younger age groups, the female mortality rate has been higher than that of males leading thereby to a reduction of 100 million women in successive censuses.

4.15.3 Economic welfare

Economically too, women all over the country are weak. They are dependent on males, the latter being their bread-earner. Only a small proportion of women are gainfully employed. They are also culturally so much dominated by the males that they cannot take any decision against the wishes of the males. An employed female is boss in the office but she is subordinate mistress in the house.
Empowerment of women is not only a regional matter. The UN declaration of 1975 compelled the national government to shift its emphasis on women’s programmes from welfare to development. Earlier to this declaration the national governments including our own floated a large number of welfare programmes for the women. But these programmes do not provide any long-term solution to the problems of women and therefore, the declaration prescribed programmes for the development of women.

Yet another effort made towards empowerment of women is the document released in 1985 after the Women’s World Congress at Nairobi. Following this conference a national document was prepared laying down forward-looking strategies for women’s development. In this document, the question of women political participation was highlighted and it was recommended that 35 per cent of the total seats should be reserved for women.

It was also recommended that some posts should be reserved for women at the block and village level bureaucracy. On the economic front, a number of income-generating schemes were introduced for women. In addition provisions were also made to keep certain proportion of women as beneficiaries in all the developmental schemes like Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), and Training of Rural Youth and Self-Employment (TRYSEM). Thus, we find a host of national and international
events, coupled with the complex social and economic factors influencing the decisions with regard to the status of women, culminating in the reservation of 33.3 per cent of the total seats for them at the panchayat level.

4.15.5 Atrocities

Much injustice is done to women all over the country. There is female infanticide observed in different parts of the country. The motivation to get a son is so strong that girl children before they are even born are killed in the womb. Such a practice is found even in metropolitan cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

There is striking evidence from Bihar where midwives are hired for killing female babies on payment of only Rs. 60 and a saree only. There are cases of rape, dowry, deaths and incest sex relations. Women in all walks of their life are discriminated against men. They are victims of atrocities. As observed earlier, the need for female empowerment was never as urgent as it is today. The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act is just only one step towards the development of women.

4.15.6 Empowerment of Weaker Sections

Empowerment of weaker sections goes back to the constitutional provisions which provide for developmental and protective safeguards for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. These groups have been given protective safeguards through legislation and reservation of
seats in Vidhan Sabhas and Lok Sabha. They are also given protection through the provision of reservation in services, professional institutions, schools and colleges. The Prevention of Atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act is a major mechanism to protect the weaker sections.

The developmental safeguards include Tribal Sub-Plan area for implementing area development in tribal majority parts. The development programmes implemented in these areas include individual beneficiary schemes and Community Development Programmes. The objective of these programmes is to improve the lifestyle of the weaker sections of society. The end result of these programmes is to empower the weaker sections of the society. These weaker sections, it must be mentioned, are largely concentrated in India’s villages.
References


2. Thara Bai (2009), “Gender, Caste and Politics in Rural Tamil Nadu, Inclusion and Exclusion in Local Governance”, Field Studies from Rural India, SAGE Publications, New Delhi, pp. 59-60.


